GOODNESS AS THE FOUNDATION OF MORALITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION

A SYNOPSIS

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BY

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INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The concept of "goodness" has long been a cornerstone of ethical discourse, serving as a foundational element in moral philosophy. In his seminal work, Foundations of Ethics, Sir W. David Ross astutely observes, "There are two compelling reasons why any student of ethics must devote attention to the nature of goodness. Firstly, we habitually regard certain dispositions, actions, and individuals as morally good; however, to comprehend the notion of 'morally good' clearly, it is essential to understand both the concept of goodness in general and the distinguishing characteristics of moral goodness. Secondly, a significant portion of our duty – indeed, according to a widely accepted theory, our entire duty – is to bring into existence that which is good."[1] Considering Ross's remarks, it becomes evident that elucidating the real nature of moral goodness is one of the most pressing questions confronting contemporary students of moral philosophy. Although current trends in moral philosophy tend to prioritize practical issues over meta-ethical concerns, the fundamental conceptual issues in moral philosophy remain pertinent and continue to occupy a central position in the field. Nevertheless, the nature of moral values, their justification, and their relationship to naturalistic frameworks remain contentious issues. This research problem, titled **"Goodness as the Foundation of Morality: A Philosophical Investigation"** seeks to explore the role of goodness in moral philosophy, particularly through a naturalistic lens. The concept of "goodness" and its multifaceted senses, encompassing both moral and nonmoral contexts, presents a complex and intriguing philosophical challenge. The term "good" is employed in diverse contexts, thereby raising fundamental questions regarding the feasibility of establishing a unified account of goodness within a naturalistic framework.

This research endeavors to explore the distinction between moral and nonmoral senses of "good" and investigate the viability of a naturalistic explanation that encompasses both. A central issue in this inquiry pertains to the nature of moral values and judgments. Unlike factual or descriptive statements, moral values are often perceived as inherently normative, thereby posing a significant challenge for grounding them within a naturalistic framework. This study will critically examine whether moral values can be reconciled with naturalistic explanations without compromising their normative force. Furthermore, this research will evaluate the Naturalistic Fallacy, which asserts that

[1]Ross, W. D. Foundations of Ethics. Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 252.

"good" is an indefinable, non-natural property that cannot be reduced to natural properties. Additionally, David Hume's "is-ought" problem presents a formidable obstacle for naturalistic approaches to ethics. Hume argued that normative conclusions cannot be logically derived from descriptive premises. This study will explore whether a naturalistic framework can effectively address this problem and bridge the gap between descriptive and normative claims. Moral relativism further complicates the discussion by asserting that moral values are not universal but are instead shaped by cultural or individual perspectives. This research will engage with relativist challenges and investigate whether a naturalistic framework can provide an objective foundation for morality. The naturalization of normativity, which involves grounding normative claims in natural facts about the world, is another key area of focus. This study will examine various approaches to naturalizing normativity and assess their viability in explaining moral phenomena. Finally, the role of emotions in ethics cannot be overlooked. Emotions are integral to moral judgments and decision-making, and this research will explore how a naturalistic account of morality can incorporate emotional responses while maintaining philosophical rigor.

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a thorough examination of the philosophical ideas of G.E. Moore and David Hume, while also integrating Freudian insights on emotions and Aristotelian perspectives on naturalistic ethics. By drawing on the contributions of thinkers such as Ayn Rand and John Rawls, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding goodness, moral values, and the challenges of naturalizing ethics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research will employ philosophical & conceptual analysis as its primary methodology. This approach involves the careful examination of concepts, arguments, and theories in moral philosophy. The research will critically analyses key texts and arguments related to the naturalistic justification of morality. Conceptual analysis is crucial for clarifying philosophical concepts within the contemporary analytic tradition. Conceptual analysis, as a methodology, plays a crucial role in providing a comprehensive

solution to the issue at hand. This analytical approach enables the extraction of precise meanings from various philosophical concepts. Throughout history, Western philosophers have employed conceptual analysis to define, explain, and clarify complex concepts. For instance, Socrates' inquiry into the nature of justice exemplifies this methodology. The primary objective of conceptual analysis is to elucidate philosophical concepts through the lens of the contemporary analytic tradition. In response to interrogative queries of the form "What is...?", philosophers have traditionally sought to provide analytic definitions of the concept in question. Analytic definitions can be understood in two distinct ways: 1. Nominal Definition: This approach focuses on the linguistic meaning of words, examining how terms are employed within language. 2. Real Definition: This approach seeks to elucidate the nature or essence of the entities or concepts denoted by the term, revealing the substantive truth about reality. The query "What is good?" inherently seeks to understand the inherent qualities that render something good. Therefore, comprehending the nature and meaning of the expression "X (good)" in the question "What is X (good)?" is essential. To resolve philosophical conundrums arising from a particular concept, it is necessary to examine the concept's overall role and function within our lives.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As Professor Alasdair MacIntyre astutely observes in his seminal work, A Short History of Ethics, "asking and answering moral questions is one thing, and asking and answering philosophical questions about morality quite another thing...the fact that in asking moral questions of a certain kind with sufficient persistence we may discover that we cannot answer them until we have asked and answered certain philosophical questions."[2] The importance of this research lies in the essence of MacIntyre's statement. Philosophical inquiry is an integral component of ethical inquiry, as revising, reinterpreting, or modifying ethical norms and principles necessitates philosophical thinking. Normative ethics, which can be regarded as a first-order moral theory, must be complemented by meta-ethical theories, which operate at a second-order level of inquiry to comprehend the notion of moral goodness, it is essential to first understand the nature of morality itself. This underscores the need for ethics to be grounded in a robust foundation of ultimate standards of ethical values, which serve as the guiding principles for all ethical actions. In this context, the present study assumes significant importance, as it seeks to explore the fundamental questions surrounding morality and ethical values.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The primary aim of this research endeavor is not to provide an exhaustive examination of the diverse perspectives on goodness espoused by various moral philosophers and writers. Rather, this study seeks to understand their insights to establish a robust foundation for moral standards, thereby informing the justification of ethical norms and principles. Specifically, this research aims to address the ambiguities surrounding the multiple meanings and senses of the fundamental ethical term "good." The focus of this inquiry is to elucidate the intrinsic meaning of moral goodness, recognizing that while relative ethical norms and principles may undergo changes, their underlying foundation should remain constant. Although moral principles and judgments may exhibit variability across different societies, it is posited that certain fundamental notions of moral concepts possess timeless, truthful, and unchanging qualities. Consequently, while conceptions of right and wrong may fluctuate, the concepts of right and good should ideally be universal. The objective of this research is to extract the essential meaning of absolute goodness, thereby providing a justification for moral standards and judgments.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The chief questions we will investigate here will focus on addressing the following fundamental questions:

- What do individuals mean when they employ moral terminology, such as 'good', 'bad', 'right', and 'wrong'? Can a naturalistic framework provide a sufficient basis for defining the concept of "good"?
- Does a universal essence of goodness exist? If so, can it be defined?
- Can a distinction be made between 'good things' and the characteristics that render them good?
- Do moral facts or properties exist? If they do, what is their nature? Are they identical to or reducible to other types of facts or properties, or are they irreducible?
- Is moral knowledge possible? Can moral judgments be classified as true or false? If so, how can we determine the veracity of our moral judgments?

- How can moral judgments and moral knowledge be justified? Can we validate their legitimacy? What assurance do we have that our moral judgments are correct?
- Can moral values, objects, and properties be identical? What do moral terms refer to when we make moral pronouncements?
- What is the origin of moral values? Are there any foundational principles? Can we provide a meaningful interpretation of the moral judgments we employ?
- Are morally right actions always right, or do moral values remain constant? Do moral values vary across individuals, societies, and contexts?
- Is it feasible to derive moral imperatives from descriptive facts obtained through empirical observation?
- To what extent can naturalistic theory be posited as a counterargument to relativistic perspectives?
- How can normativity be reconciled with naturalism, and what implications arise from this synthesis?
- What significance do emotions hold in ethical decision-making and moral philosophy?
- In what ways can psychological analysis illuminate our understanding of moral principles and values?

POSSIBLE CHAPTERS OF THE THESIS

The research work has been divided into six chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The proposed chapters of our work are as follows:

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: ETHICAL NATURALISM: HISTORY, CLASSIFI- CATIONS AND CHALLENGES: TAXONOMIC ANALYSIS

Chapter 2: HUME'S GUILLOTINE: A NATURALISTIC DEFENCE

Chapter 3: MOORE'S OPEN QUESTION ARGUMENT – REFUTE WITH NATURALISTIC ARGUMENTATIONS

Chapter 4: RELATIVISTS OBSTACLES AND NATURAL- ISTIC ANSWERS

Chapter 5: NATURALIZING ETHICAL NORMATIVITY

CONCLUSION

A WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY (SELECTIVE)

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: **ETHICAL NATURALISM: HISTORY, CLASSIFI- CATIONS AND CHALLENGES: TAXONOMIC ANALYSIS** provides an in- depth examination of ethical naturalism, a meta-ethical theory that posits that moral facts are equivalent to natural facts. The theory asserts that moral properties can be explained in terms of natural properties, and that ethical statements are empirically verifiable and grounded in the natural world. The origins of ethical naturalism are traced back to ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle argued that moral virtues are grounded in human nature and flourishing, linking ethics to the natural functions and purposes of human beings. The historical development of ethical naturalism is also explored, including its modern era prominence through the works of utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The chapter also evaluates ethical naturalism, highlighting both its praise and criticism. Proponents argue that it provides a scientifically grounded framework for understanding morality, while critics raise objections, including the naturalistic fallacy. Furthermore, the chapter categorizes ethical naturalism into four primary forms: reductive naturalism, non- reductive naturalism, synthetic naturalism, and Cornell realism. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that ethical naturalism remains a significant and debated theory in meta-ethics, offering a framework for understanding morality within the natural world. Its historical evolution and diverse approaches highlight the ongoing efforts to reconcile moral philosophy with scientific inquiry.

Chapter 2: **HUME'S GUILLOTINE: A NATURALISTIC DEFENCE** delves into the philosophical framework of David Hume, particularly his "is-ought" problem, which poses a significant challenge to ethical naturalism. Hume argues that moral claims cannot be logically derived from factual statements, as "is" statements pertain to natural facts, whereas "ought" statements belong to the realm of morality. Hume's Fork categorizes propositions into two distinct types: analytic and synthetic. He asserts that moral "ought" claims do not conform to either category, as they cannot be empirically verified or known solely through definition. According to Hume, morality is rooted in sentiment, rather than objective fact. In response to Hume's challenge, various philosophers have proposed naturalistic defences. John Searle's counter-example seeks to derive "ought" judgments from "is" statements, while Alan Gewirth's approach posits that moral "ought" statements can be derived from descriptive "is" statements. Ayn Rand's objective ethics posits that

human life is the standard of value, with reason, purpose, and self-esteem being fundamental categories of values. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the ongoing debate surrounding the "is-ought" problem and the various naturalistic responses that have been proposed. The discussion underscores the complexities of reconciling moral philosophy with scientific inquiry, while emphasizing the importance of understanding human nature and the inherent values that arise from it.

Chapter 3: **MOORE'S OPEN QUESTION ARGUMENT – REFUTE WITH NATURALISTIC ARGUMENTATIONS** This chapter critically examines G.E. Moore's philosophical inquiry into ethics, particularly his concept of the "open question argument." Moore posits that "good" is an indefinable, unanalysable notion that cannot be reduced to a natural property. He critiques naturalistic ethics, arguing that attempts to define "good" in terms of natural properties commit the naturalistic fallacy. In response to Moore's critique, this chapter explores naturalistic argumentations that refute his open question argument. Ayn Rand's objective ethics framework, for instance, posits that morality is a code of values guiding human choices and actions, grounded in objective reality. Rand argues that human life is the standard of value, and that which promotes survival and well-being is considered good. John Rawls' theory of goodness as rationality is also examined. Rawls categorizes good into three distinct categories and argues that a rational plan for an individual can determine their good. His theory of good is inherently dependent on the principle of justice, emphasizing the importance of universality, restrictedness, and free accessibility. Ultimately, this chapter concludes that a naturalistic moral standpoint, emphasizing human happiness as the ultimate desire, offers a more pragmatic approach to understanding goodness. This perspective acknowledges the complexity of human nature and promotes a compassionate and empathetic understanding of human flourishing

Chapter 4: **RELATIVISTS OBSTACLES AND NATURALISTIC ANSWERS** explores the philosophical perspective of moral relativism, which poses a significant challenge to traditional notions of morality. Moral relativism encompasses various forms, including descriptive, meta-ethical, and normative relativism. In contrast, proponents of the natural law account argue that moral phenomena can be justified by reference to natural phenomena, positing that moral principles can be grounded in an objective, universal framework. The chapter explores the nuances of moral relativism, including its rejection of absolute truth and its emphasis on the role of conceptual frameworks in determining

moral value. Relativism is understood as a relative approach contingent upon specific frameworks, with meta-ethical relativism asserting that no moral judgments or standards are objectively true or false. The chapter also presents arguments against relativism, including the principle of non-contradiction and the distinction between speculative and practical truth. Furthermore, natural law theory is presented as a counter to

moral relativism, positing that universal moral principles exist, grounded in human nature. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that natural law theory provides a more comprehensive and coherent framework for understanding morality, one that is grounded in human nature and universal principles.

Chapter 5: **NATURALIZING ETHICAL NORMATIVIT** This chapter explores & examine the concept of normative ethics, focusing on establishing standards to define and explain moral rightness and wrongness. The chapter examines consequentialism, a moral theory that evaluates moral rules based on their consequences, with the goal of achieving the best possible outcomes. Consequentialism is comprised of two primary components: the theory of right acts and the theory of moral goodness. The theory of right acts posits that moral rules should be evaluated based on their consequences, while the theory of moral goodness defines moral goodness in terms of wellbeing. The chapter also discusses the empirical reliability of consequentialism, evaluating its predictions about people's wellbeing through subjective and objective measures of happiness. Abductive arguments, a form of reasoning employed in ethics and social sciences, are used to extract the best predictions from incomplete observations. Furthermore, the chapter explores the relationship between naturalism and deontology, a normative ethical theory that evaluates moral actions based on a set of rules and principles. Naturalistic responses to deontological concerns involve formulating moral principles based on empirical observations, providing a foundation for deontological theory. The chapter concludes that natural law theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding morality, one that is grounded in human nature and universal principles.

Finally, the **CONCLUSION section** reflects a naturalistic reinterpretation of Aristotelian & Axistentialist ethics provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human nature, morality, and flourishing. By grounding its core concepts in empirical and scientific frameworks, Aristotelian ethics can be revitalized and made relevant to contemporary debates in ethics and moral psychology.

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